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AUTHOR Himes, James R.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Following background information on primary school completion rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, this report discusses: (1) the problems of child labor in these regions; (2) a proposed action program for UNICEF and its partners; (3) an analysis of the child labor situation, including research and evaluation; and (4) possible solution strategies. While Latin American and the Caribbean seem to be experiencing robust economic growth, the primary school completion rate in these areas is deplorable. This is particularly problematic because it comes at a time when there is an increasing need for workers educated at the post-secondary level. A UNICEF plan to fight this problem includes the following principles: (1) organizations should work for the eradication of labor for children 12 and under; (2) for children 14 and under, the primary focus should be on formal schooling; (3) for 15- to 18-year-olds, the focus should be on providing appropriate occupation benefits, including, most importantly, educational measures. To better understand the problem of child labor in these regions, there needs to be systematic information athering on working children which supports the principles liste above. Any recommendations or efforts dealing with the problem of child labor must be aware of the economic and ethical issues involved. (JW)

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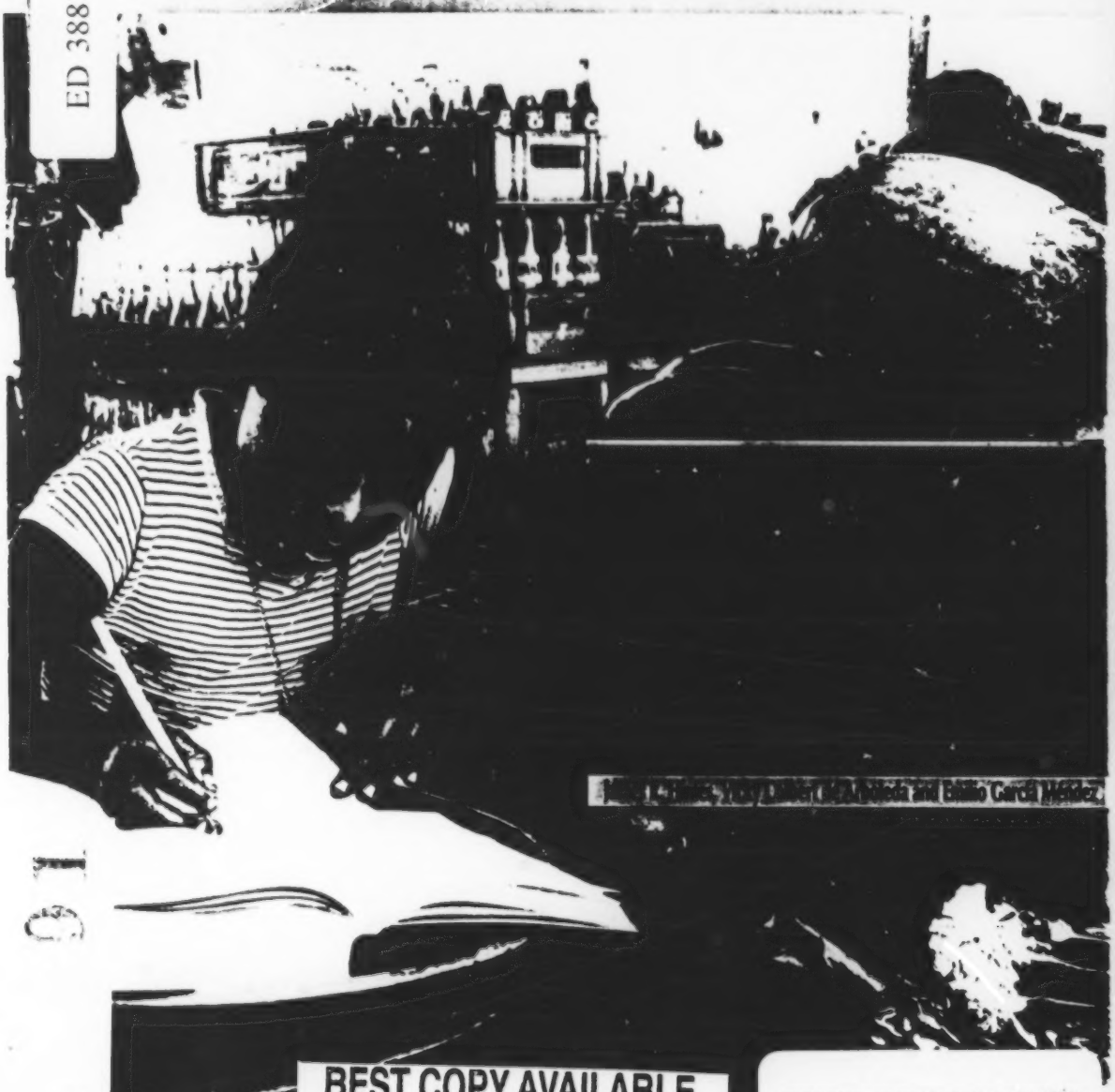

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Florence, Italy

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CHILD LABOUR AND BASIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: A PROPOSED UNICEF INITIATIVE

by
James R. Himes, Vicky Colbert de Arboleda and Emilio García Méndez

James R. Himes, Director, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy

Vicky Colbert de Arboleda, Regional Adviser for Education, UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, Bogotá, Colombia

Emilio García Méndez, Regional Adviser for Child Rights, UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, Bogotá, Colombia

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1 - BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION: PARADOXES FOR THE 1990s?

Following the 'lost decade' of the 1980s, there appear to be a number of cruel paradoxes developing in the Latin American and Caribbean region as it moves through the first half of a new decade which is supposed to be characterized by sustainable economic growth as well as increased social equity. For organizations concerned with children and youth, one of the most troublesome of these paradoxes can be simply stated: as most of the countries in this dynamic, middle-income region begin what appears to be their fourth year of reasonably robust economic growth, accompanied by unprecedented net flows of foreign investment and an extraordinary degree of optimism about the region in international business and financial circles, Latin America nevertheless remains mired in a deplorable situation where its primary school completion rates rank with those of the much poorer countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. At the same time, the increasing degree to which much of the region is integrated with the world economy, among other factors, suggests that a steadily increasing proportion of new jobs will require post-primary and post-secondary education.

The high primary school enrolment rates in Latin America and the Caribbean mask an extremely poor performance in terms of the quality, relevance and cost-effectiveness of formal schooling in the region. On average, about 20 per cent of children start primary school late, some 40 per cent repeat the first year, and 30 per cent repeat the second. The overall average of primary school repetition is about 30 per cent per year[1]. Repetition rates for children in rural areas, among indigenous groups and in urban slums and shantytowns are about twice the national averages[2]. Brazil, the largest and one of the richest countries in the region, has a primary school completion rate of only 22 per cent, one of the lowest in the world[3]. UNICEF's *Progress of Nations* report calculates the percentage of children worldwide reaching grade five. The rates for South America, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa all hover around 50 per cent, in spite of the fact that 99 per cent of children in South America (versus only 71 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa) start school. In terms of the 'performance gaps' which UNICEF calculates, only five countries in the South and Central American and Caribbean region have fourth grade completion rates equal to or better than the 'expected' rates in terms of their levels of per capita GNP[4].

At least 20 million primary school pupils repeat a year of schooling every year, and the annual cost of this inefficiency of the system has been estimated at $2.5 billion[5].

Although cross-national surveys of educational achievement rarely include results from developing countries, a recent review by the World Bank suggests that the quality of school performance in Latin America (and to a lesser extent the English-speaking Caribbean) is significantly below that not only of the industrialized countries but also of many developing countries in Asia. If additional evidence were needed of the inequalities characteristic of the region's school system, test results in expensive private schools of Latin America compare favourably with national averages in Thailand or the United States, for example, and are well above results in the public schools of the region[6].

What happens to the millions of children in Latin America and the Caribbean who repeat school years, underperform in their first years of

1 Colbert de Arboleda, Vicky, "Una Perspectiva Regional en Educación Básica en América Latina y El Caribe", UNICEF Bogotá (draft January 1994), p. 1 and pp. 6-7.

2 Wolff, Lawrence, Ernesto Shiefelbein and Jorge Valenzuela, *Mejoramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Primaria en América Latina y el Caribe*: Hacia el Siglio XXI, Programa de Estudios Regionales, Informe No. 28, World Bank, Washington D.C., May 1993, p. x and pp. 17-19.

3 UNICEF, *State of the World's Children 1994*, Oxford University Press, p. 70.

4 UNICEF, *The Progress of Nations 1993*, UNICEF, New York, p. 51.

5 Wolff, see note 2, *supra*, p. 14.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-9.

The high primary school enrolment rates in Latin America and the Caribbean mask an extremely poor performance in terms of the quality, relevance and cost-effectiveness of formal schooling.

photo UNICEF/Didier Bregnard

schooling and eventually drop out? Hard data are scarce (in this and many other areas concerning children living in poverty and other forms of deprivation). But clearly, in the increasingly demanding and competitive job markets of the formal economic sector, as well as the somewhat more 'modern' export-oriented segments of the less formal sectors, the life prospects for these 'out-of-school' children and youth are grim. The vast majority are 'working children' of one sort or another – but their work is likely to lead nowhere in terms of expanded opportunities or eventually to a decent standard of living for them and their future families. The majority of out-of-school girls, after or in addition to working in their own homes, are likely to end up as domestics, exposed to greater risks and fewer opportunities than their employers like to admit. Rural school drop-outs who do not migrate (a diminishing proportion) can find some work in low-productivity field-based or small-enterprise activities. But the largest numbers end up increasingly in the totally unprotected, low-earning segments of the vast and growing informal economies of the urban centres of Latin America and the Caribbean. Contrary to popular impressions, only a small minority of these urban drop-outs are 'street children'. But their situation is little better and sometimes worse than that of the more highly publicized children 'of the streets'. Whether on the streets or not, there is some evidence that increasing numbers are ending up in illegal and often extremely dangerous activities such as the drug trade, theft and extortion rings, and prostitution.

There are a number of structural or cultural factors in Latin America and parts of the Caribbean (increasingly evident too in some industrialized countries, notably the United States) which make it especially difficult for at-risk or out-of-school youth to acquire the discipline, skills, certification and social acceptance needed to find and keep productive jobs with decent wages. The persistence of poverty in many households over multiple generations is a main

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Children's work is often unpaid, but may be essential to family survival strategies.

photo UNICEF/Jeremy Horner

factor. A recent World Bank study in Mexico demonstrated a strong inverse correlation between primary school completion and being in the bottom 20 per cent of the income distribution[7]. There appears to be little movement out of this bottom income quintile over time. Research in the region also suggests the presence of a considerable 'cultural shock' and maladaptation process facing children from very poor or minority families during the first few years of primary schooling. Even an official report of the Brazilian Ministry of Education admits that the school system faces an "incapacity to meet the heterogeneous needs of students. A 'culture of failure' has been created, leading to loss of self-esteem and early abandonment of school life"[8]. Intergenerational inequities are intensified by the fact that young female drop-outs are highly likely to become young teenaged mothers of children facing the same 'culture of failure'.

The incidence of poverty in the region has changed very little over the last two decades, with a decrease in rural poverty accompanied by an increase in urban areas, presumably linked partly to

7 World Bank, *Poverty Reduction Handbook*, Washington, D.C., 1992, pp. 3-22.

8 Ministry of Education and Sports, *Ten Year Plan of Education for All*, Brasilia, 1993, p. 31.

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migratory patterns. In absolute numbers, one estimate suggests that there were 183 million people living in poverty at the end of the 1980s, compared with 113 million in 1970. The notoriously inequitable distribution of income in Latin America (which translates into highly inequitable access to quality and affordable schooling) has also shown few signs of abating and may even be getting worse in some countries[9].

RELATION BETWEEN CHILD LABOUR AND BASIC EDUCATION

The link between education and child labour is more complex than is sometimes thought. Myron Weiner has (very usefully, in our view) attracted considerable attention to this issue by his bold assertion, reflecting partly an expressed frustration with the especially difficult case of India, that "Compulsory primary education is the policy instrument by which the state effectively removes children from the labour force"[10]. Most experts on the history of child labour, as summarized in a recent paper prepared for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) by Hugh Cunningham[11], tend to ascribe a much more complex array of causal factors, including economic, technological, cultural and ideological variables, to the decline of child labour in the West. Some writers even view the laws on compulsory education in Western countries as the 'final cap' rather than a main cause of the virtual elimination of child labour. Most experts on education view the perceptions of relevance and rewards from education, as seen by both parents and children, as more important to the expansion of primary schooling than legal compulsion, i.e. by means of attempts to compel children to attend school or to remain out of the labour force. Nevertheless, there are some convincing examples, cited by both Cunningham and Weiner, of legal measures regarding schooling as well as child labour which have made a difference in terms of progress on both fronts.

Much of the literature on working children in contemporary developing countries, especially the low-income countries of Africa and South Asia (including studies in India supported by UNICEF), tends to view household-level poverty, combined with parental perceptions of high opportunity costs associated with schooling, as the main reason why children work rather than attend school[12]. Children are perceived as simply not being able to attend school, at least on any regular basis, since they provide: (a) significant financial support to their families; and/or (b) essential (but non-remunerated) support for the household through the care of younger siblings or house-keeping and other domestic chores. In some cases, however, it is clear that children would not attend school even if they didn't have to work – reflecting either negative decisions about the usefulness of school or, in some cultures, a traditional reluctance to allow girl children full access to formal schools.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a growing perception that an economic explanation (not to mention 'justification') for children working rather than being in primary school is questionable. There is certainly no doubt that the social rates of return in the region to primary education are far higher than for any other likely alternative uses of the time of six to 12/14 year-old children. The much-quoted World Bank figures on the social returns to primary education show a 26 per cent return for Latin America and the Caribbean (versus 18 and 16 per cent, respectively, for secondary and higher education). The results of the recent study for Mexico are even

9 Aranibar, Ernesto, "Dimensiones Estructurales del Ajuste Social: Centroamerica Frente a los 90", UNICEF, Bogota, Dec. 1991, p. 4; Cornia, Giovanni Andrea, "Macroeconomic Policy, Poverty Alleviation and Long-Term Development in Latin America in the 1990s", *Innocenti Occasional Papers*, Economic Policies Series, no. 40, UNICEF, Florence. For real GDP growth and projections for the region, see: International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook*, Washington D.C., October 1993, p. 177.

10 Weiner, Myron, *The Child and the State in India*, Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 3.

11 Cunningham, Hugh, "Child Labour and Industrialization: A Report for the ILO", (unpublished paper, c. Dec. 1993).

12 Myers, William E. (ed.) *Protecting Working Children*, Zed Books in association with UNICEF, 1991, p. 9 and *passim*; Boyden, Jo, *Children of the Cities*, Zed Books, 1991, p. 117 and *passim*; Chatterjee, Amrita, "The Forgotten Children of the Cities", *Innocenti Studies*, UNICEF, Florence, 1992. *The Economist*, January 15, 1994, p. 62, cites a recent study by UNICEF and the Tamil Nadu Government in India of an estimated 80,000 children working in the matchmaking factories of Sivakasi; from that study it is estimated that "half the Sivakasi match-industry families would fall below the poverty line if children were stopped from working".

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Are these the building blocks for a healthy childhood?

photoILO/J. Maillard

more dramatic: 32 per cent for primary education (versus 5-6 per cent for secondary and 14 per cent for university education)[13].

Regarding the household level, and in terms of private returns to the alternative uses of children's time in various age groups, there has been little systematic research (in developing countries), including the value of children's earnings in relation to total household income and well-being. The limited evidence which does exist is beginning to suggest that the short-term private returns of child labour to the Latin American family may be much less than commonly assumed. Rarely does the proportion of household income generated by children appear to exceed 10-20 per cent. Many of the exceptions are likely to be in some areas of all-too-lucrative illegal activities or perhaps in some family-based agricultural activities in the poorest countries or states. There are numerous problems with the few studies which do exist, however, including a frequent failure to disaggregate the results by age group, gender, and size/structure of the family. An important relationship between children's work and mothers' work and income remains virtually unexplored[14]. Few studies, furthermore, look at both children's earnings and the number of hours (remunerated or not) which children actually work – which is likely to be a higher proportion of total family-hours worked than income earned as a percentage of total family income (especially, one suspects, in households headed by women or an underemployed adult male). The issue of the number of hours worked by children is especially important because of the demonstrated relationship between the hours of effective school attendance and school performance, particularly at the primary level.

LEGAL MEASURES LINKING SCHOOLING AND CHILD LABOUR

Just as views differ on the relationship between child labour and education, one can find many different interpretations, both from history

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13 World Bank, see note 7 *supra*.

14 A recent World Bank study entitled *Indigenous People and Poverty in Latin America: An Empirical Analysis* found that children of indigenous people were more than twice as likely as non-indigenous children to be working and that children of indigenous mothers who are **not** in the labour force are more likely to work. A summary of this study appears in *Finance and Development*, World Bank, March 1994, pp. 41-43.

Child worker in a car repair shop. Too young to bear such a heavy load.

Photo ILO/D. Bregnard

and contemporary cases, regarding the links between specific state interventions to reduce or eliminate child labour and to extend primary education to all children. Again Weiner throws the gauntlet in the current debate with his statement: "Compulsory education laws usually precede child-labour laws, and their enforcement substantially reduces or eliminates child labour"[15]. While others question the ultimate importance of 'compulsion' (as opposed to financial support, other incentives, quality and related aspects of public policy) as an effective tool of the State in social areas such as child labour and education, there is no doubt that nations, going at least back to the early nineteenth-century Swedish and Prussian cases cited by Weiner[16], have moved towards establishing (and therefore financing) compulsory education as they also acted to regulate child labour.

15 Weiner, see note 10 *supra*, p. 191.
16 *Ibid*., p. 111 and *passim*.

The international legal aspects of child labour in relation to schooling are a more recent twentieth-century subject, but the issues do extend at least to the origins of the ILO, whose constitution, it should be noted, cites one of its aims as "the assurance of equality of educational and vocational opportunity". Indeed, the International Labour Convention of 1921 relied partly on compulsory education laws even to deal with the often contentious issue of employment in agriculture by prohibiting such employment of children under 14 "save outside the hours fixed for school attendance"[17]. Over 40 years ago, before the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, an ILO report included a passage which serves as a useful reminder of the critical link between eradicating child labour and providing 'proper schooling':

> *Clearly, the immediate aim of the provisions fixing a minimum age below which children are forbidden to work is to protect the child against the harmful physical and moral effects that premature full-time employment may have on his young body and mind; but such protection would be incomplete if it were not supplemented by provisions to ensure that the child receives proper schooling during the time when he is not yet permitted to work. Without proper education during childhood it will hardly be possible for the grown man or woman to acquire the fundamental intellectual and moral equipment for a successful career and full participation in the civil and cultural life of the nation*[18].

Of some interest in terms of the legal and policy dimensions of the problems we are concerned with are a number of Latin American and Caribbean cases in which poverty has been cited in legislation as a reason for at least partial exemption from laws governing the minimum age of entry into the labour force. (Exemptions of this sort

17 ILO, "Child Labour in Relation to Compulsory Education", *International Labour Review*, vol. LXIV, no. 1, July 1951, p. 463.
18 *Ibid*.

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have existed in many countries, including various jurisdictions in the United States.) In a number of Latin American examples, however, where the full-time employment of children has been permitted on the grounds of poverty, the exemption is often made on the condition that the child has received a certain minimum of compulsory education. Ecuador, for example, has permitted such education to take place in evening schools. An early ILO report casts doubts on the appropriateness of some of these measures: "In such cases, however, the safeguarding provision will hardly ensure a satisfactory level of education, as a child attending an evening class after a full day's work is unlikely to obtain proper benefit from the instruction given"[19]. A more recent ILO report notes: "In some Latin American countries (Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), the law provides that work may be authorised by the competent authority if it is deemed essential to the subsistence of the young person or his/her family **and does not affect compulsory schooling**"[20].

Both at the national and international levels, there has long been a direct association between the legal minimum age for employment and the age of completion of compulsory schooling. At least as early as the mid-1930s, ILO Recommendations and reports indicated that these ages should be the same. There has clearly been a consistent concern that legal employment before a child reaches the age up to which school attendance is obligatory may easily lead to exploitation and failure to complete the basic education cycle. Similarly, if the school-leaving age is lower than the legal employment age, concern has been expressed that "children may be left without useful occupation during the transitional period and exposed to the dangers of the street or to illegal exploitation"[21].

The most recent available review by the ILO of minimum age and compulsory schooling legislation in Latin America and the Caribbean suggests that there are only relatively minor exceptions in this region, in terms of the legal norms, to the principle that these two ages should be identical[22]. The age of 14 is the most common for both provisions. Minimum age of employment legislation is complicated, however, by numerous exceptions by sector and by type of work. In general, legislation in the region is consistent on the point that full-time employment should be permitted only if compulsory schooling has been completed. Several countries, however, (Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Suriname and Uruguay – plus a few others in some sectors) require compulsory education only up to an age that is 1-2 years younger than the basic minimum age of employment.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 467.
20 ILO, "Child Labour: Law and Practice", *Conditions of Work Digest*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1991, p. 23 (emphasis added).
21 ILO, see note 17 *supra*, p. 463.
22 ILO, see note 20 *supra*, pp. 35-38.

2 - A PROPOSED ACTION PROGRAMME FOR UNICEF AND ITS PARTNERS

JUSTIFICATION FOR ACTION ROOTED IN THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The entry into force of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in nearly all countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region offers UNICEF both a new opportunity and an implicit obligation to review its approach to the issue of working children as well as basic education in the region. Article 32 of the Convention specifies that:

> *States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.*

In its less-often cited second clause, Article 32 also requires States Parties to "take legislative, administrative, social and **educational** measures to ensure the implementation of the present article" (emphasis added). Unlike any other provision in the Convention, moreover, Article 32 stipulates that States Parties provide for "appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement" of this article.

The actual prospects for the "effective enforcement" of this provision will be dependent on a number of developments in the Latin American and Caribbean region during the coming years. Most relevant will be: (1) the success of widely heralded but still ineffective policies to address the serious and persistent problems of poverty and income generation/distribution in most of the region; and (2) the results of efforts to achieve higher quality, more relevant and more efficient education systems, especially at the preschool, primary and initial secondary levels.

UNICEF has been active – and should continue to be so – in analysing problems of poverty in the region and in serving as an advocate for economic and social policies aimed at alleviating some of the aspects of poverty of greatest harm to women and children. A number of imaginative, though small-scale, programmes for income generation for women (and, to a lesser extent, for working youth) have also been supported by UNICEF in the region. The limitations of our resources as well as our mandate, however, inevitably place significant obstacles in the way of UNICEF's having a major impact on the poverty side of the child labour/basic education issue. Those aspects of the problem, on the other hand, which relate to the interrelationship between the eradication of child labour and the goals for basic education for the 1990s, appear to offer us (also in the context of UNICEF's emerging role *vis-à-vis* the CRC) a very promising opportunity for a substantially increased commitment.

In terms of the provisions of the Convention relating to basic education, there is of course ample justification for developing the child labour/education link under the conceptual framework of the rights of the child. Article 28 provides the main basis for this link, especially the provision which makes "primary education compulsory and available free to all". The recognition that this right must be achieved "progressively" is a realistic (though unstated) counterpart provision to the common understanding, in reality if not always in law, that illegal forms of child labour must also be eradicated over reasonable periods of time.

Especially in terms of the linkages we are concerned with among the post-primary-education child population, other provisions of Article 28 are also of relevance. Article 28 (1)(b) encourages the development of different forms of secondary education, including vocational education, as well as "appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need". Subsequent clauses relate to making "educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children", and call for "measures to encourage regular attendance

at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates". International cooperation is specifically called for in Article 28 (3).

In terms of the importance in the Latin American region which many education specialists assign to early childhood development and to the difficult home-to-school transition for young children from low-income families, it is also worth recalling that a less frequently cited provision of the CRC, Article 18 (3), requires that States Parties "take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible". Although that provision is cautiously worded, falling well short of establishing a right to preschool education, nevertheless this 'opening' is worth pursuing. Among other reasons, the political potential of linking developmentally sound child care to the needs and rights of working parents, including a strategic bridge to women's rights, is of considerable significance to UNICEF and its allies.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

Both in realistic recognition of the 'progressive' nature of the progress which needs to be achieved on both the child labour and the basic education fronts, but also to develop a politically more powerful message for UNICEF's advocacy and action in these areas, we propose that the following framework be adopted as the basic guide to UNICEF action during the remainder of this decade:

1. **For children aged 12 and under, the unequivocal first principle should be the eradication of child labour**. There is simply no justification in a region such as Latin America and the Caribbean for a continuation of this practice. Countries should be challenged to address this

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issue as a sort of child rights equivalent of eliminating polio from the western hemisphere. This goal can be achieved (though less easily, to be sure, than eradicating polio); so the only questions we should address are how and when – and the sooner the better. In addition to the positive steps UNICEF should take, with ILO and others, to help achieve this goal (see below), we need to be sure that ongoing UNICEF-supported activities in favour of working and street children – however well-intentioned – are not, in fact, helping to keep some of these 12 year-old and younger children on the streets and in the labour force, rather than in primary schools.

2. For both the 12-and-under children and the 13-14 year olds (i.e., generally those up to the end of the compulsory school age in the region), **the centrality of the formal school needs to be the primary focus of policies and interventions**. For the older (13-14) age group, professional and vocational education should become more viable options for students so inclined, but with an emphasis on the acquisition of learning skills and reasoning ability, rather than 'job training' (which has largely failed in schools). Financial aid, health and nutrition services, work/study arrangements, apprenticeships, special support for 'drop-outs' and other measures need to be taken to enable children from disadvantaged families to benefit from relevant basic as well as professional/vocational education opportunities, of acceptable quality, at least through their fourteenth year.

3. For youth in the 15-18 age group, who can legally work in most countries of the region – and often must work, both for the sake of their own education as well as to assist their families (including a growing number of teenaged or young single mothers) – the primary emphasis should shift to **appropriate occupational benefits and protection** for these young workers, including from hazardous occupations (which are illegal for youth in most countries in the region). **Complementary measures in education**, however, including apprenticeships and non-formal 'young adult education', can help to ensure that workers in this age group benefit from more professional, employment-oriented and 'option expanding' opportunities than are usually available for youth from low-income and otherwise disadvantaged families in Latin America and the Caribbean. As young people move through their teenage years, the need to find more viable and relevant ways to combine education with employment becomes increasingly important for their future.

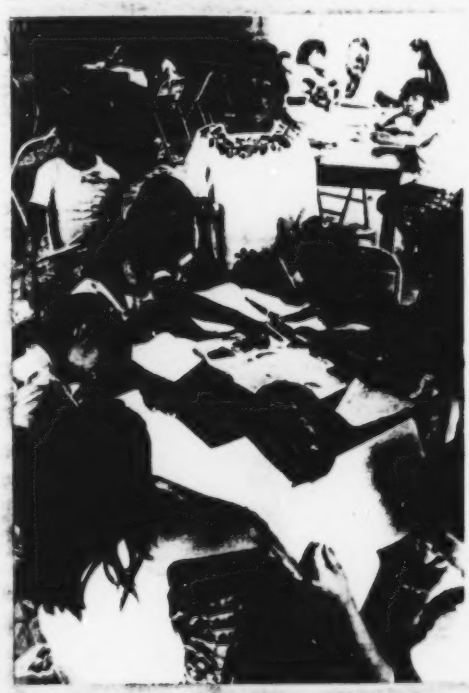
Teenage girls from the Caribbean develop work skills in a training programme held in Barbados.

photo UNICEF/C. McBean

BUILDING THE POLITICAL COMMITMENT AND FORGING A BROADER ALLIANCE

The prospects for putting these principles into effective action will depend to a great extent on a radically new approach to the relationship between schools and work. A broader debate needs to be initiated regarding new forms of schooling, and this exchange must not be limited to the traditional specialists in the field of education. The business sector and the trade unions, for example, need to be mobilized to become part of the vanguard of the civil society demanding a better education system, a movement capable of breaking the deadening inertia of that system – a system which is insufficient, inadequate and frequently irrelevant.

To reinforce the movement for serious educational reform and innovation, there also needs to be a political and cultural assault aimed at developing a profound social consciousness of child labour as a real barrier to more equitable and sustainable development. Powerful vested interests, typically in both the private and public sectors, often need to be overcome in the fight against child labour and for improved public education. Human rights groups, women's movements, parent and teacher associations, community and consumer organizations, religious groups, unions, the mass media and other major actors in society can play critical roles in this effort. Political action and advocacy needs to be organized not only at the national and international levels but most importantly at the state, local and community levels. Particularly in terms of the focus of the initiative described in this paper, it is at those more local levels that critical actions involving the intersection of children's worlds of schooling and work are most likely to be effective.



Schools can be simple, even crowded, but competent teachers, adequate materials and relevant curricula are essential.

photo UNICEF/G. Schytte

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SPECIFIC POLICY AND PROGRAMME MEASURES FOR COMBATTING CHILD LABOUR

Measures to combat child labour have been dealt with extensively in ILO and other publications. ILO is the first to admit that most of these measures, especially conventional enforcement and inspection procedures, have met with only limited success in dealing with the severe problems of exploitation of children in the workplace. Although the numbers are notoriously approximate, knowledgeable observers fear the incidence of child labour is increasing in many developing countries, including in Latin America. Accordingly, ILO is in the process of strengthening and broadening its approach to child labour, and, partly as a result of substantial funding made available by the Government of Germany (for the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour – IPEC), a number of new initiatives are underway, primarily in Asia and Latin America, which show considerable promise.

The full range of actions that might be considered by organizations committed to a broader and bolder approach to combatting child labour is suggested by a useful "typology of child labour projects" included in a recent ILO publication[23] (see Panel I). In addition to identifying five different types of intervention, this typology usefully indicates various levels of targeted action, from the child and the family to governmental activities. A helpful further step would be to break down the levels of required governmental action, from the international (ILO, UNICEF, Committee on the Rights of the Child, etc.) to the municipal or district level of public-sector intervention. Again, that local level of action may well be one key to success in this area of linking child labour eradication with the provision of basic educational opportunities.

Some of the organizations concerned with child labour are aware of the fact that, particularly during these times of severe economic and fiscal pressures in many countries, combined with neoliberal economic orthodoxies prevailing in the 'global' political economy, priority setting will be

23 Fyfe, Alec, *Child Labour: A Guide to Project Design*, ILO, Geneva, 1993, pp. 12-16. Note also an earlier version of this typology in Myers, see note 12, *supra*, Table 10.1.

Panel 1

A Typology of Child Labour Projects*

Type of intervention	Levels of intervention			
	Child	Family	Community	Government
Education and training	• Access to schooling • Non-formal education • Vocational training	• Stipends • Adapting school hours to family needs • Educating parents on value of education	• Provision of schooling/vocational training in community centres	• Expansion of education, especially universal primary education, to be made compulsory • Reforms to promote access, especially for girls and those in rural areas
Welfare services	• Health monitoring • Supplementary nutrition • Access to health care • Removal from hazardous work	• Health education • Social security • Welfare support • Income generation	• Provision of community health centres • Drop-in centres	• Expansion of health and welfare provision based on community provision • Devolving power to local level
Protected work	• Provision of safe employment tailored to developmental needs • Work placement schemes • Sheltered workshops		• Provision of protected work schemes • Volunteer support	• Government support of community-based initiatives
Advocacy	• Establish contact using peers • Developing awareness of situation and rights • Develop self-representation • Use of mass media e.g. comics	• Information on health and education	• Citizens' groups • Community theatre • Mass media, e.g. radio • Mobilize teachers/ religious groups/ voluntary organizations/ employers' groups	• Awareness-raising within ministries • Communicating strategies raising public awareness
Regulation and enforcement	• Raise awareness of labour laws • Report violations	• Educate families concerning the law and their responsibilities	• Mobilize trade unions on behalf of unorganized/marginal workers • Educate employers on the law and work effects on children • Citizens' committees and pressure groups for enforcement	• New legislation where necessary • Adaptation of laws to local reality • Expansion of inspectorate and its enhanced quality • Registration campaigns

* Fyfe, A., *Child labour: A Guide to Project Design*, ILO Child Labour Collection, Geneva, 1993, pp. 14-15.

A long way from ... © UNICEF/Jeremy Horner

essential to achieving even the 'progressive' (i.e. gradual) implementation of child labour regulations called for in most UN conventions dealing with economic and social rights. Two broad areas of priority have been stressed in recent ILO statements[24].

1. **The identification of and the prohibition of child work in hazardous and unsafe activities**. This concern has increasingly come to include not just obviously hazardous work in small industrial and mining sectors, involving such risks as dangerous machinery and chemical or fire hazards, but also more 'invisible' forms of exploitation such as that suffered by children working in private households as domestic servants, in totally unregulated and sometimes criminalized informal-sector jobs, and in the sex trade.

2. **Targeting the problem of child labourers at risk mainly because of the very early age at which they begin to work**. ILO has noted that a surprisingly large number of children begin work even before they are 10 years old, and often in occupations such as brick-making, quarrying, scavenging, and match- and fireworks-making which are considered hazardous even for adults. "Many countries have the capacity for, and some have demonstrated the feasibility of, banning child employment before the completion of compulsory primary education or before the age of 12 to 13 years. Such a measure would almost at a stroke significantly reduce the incidence of child labour and provide protection for the youngest and most vulnerable groups" [25].

Three major means of action are then identified by ILO:

1. **The provision of universal compulsory education**. "Education is of special significance because it is undoubtedly the single most important instrument for absorbing children away from the labour market." [26] Panel II identifies a number of important provisos which ILO has added to this concern for uni-

24 ILO, see note 20 *supra*, pp. 12-13.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
26 *Ibid.*

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Panel II

For Education Systems to be effective as instruments to combat child labour, several conditions must be met

1. The existing disparities between and within sectors and among socio-economic groups must be narrowed through the increased availability of education facilities and services in relatively deprived sectors and the provision of incentives for increased access by deprived socio-economic groups.

2. The quality of education, which remains quite unsatisfactory in many countries as measured by qualitative and quantitative criteria such as school attendance, drop-out rates, access to employment, and the value attached to it by poor people, needs to be improved so as to increase the attractiveness of schooling and justify its cost.

3. The real economic cost of schooling to the poor must to the extent possible be reduced. Education is a social right, and the poor must not be denied that right because of their disadvantageous economic position and the associated explicit and/or implicit costs of schooling: for the poor, these costs may consist of such direct expenses as school fees, the cost of uniforms and school materials, and other incidental expenses. These may appear to be small by the standards of the well-to-do, but can be a significant burden on families who barely eke out a living. But perhaps far more important is the cost of sending children to school in terms of foregone earnings, which can be substantial. Some studies show that the earnings of child workers can account for as much as 30 per cent or more of household incomes. In such situations, families send their children to school only at their own peril. The long-term solution lies obviously in promoting income- and employment-generating schemes. But could society not consider alternative schemes, such as school feeding programmes and other innovative measures, in order to lighten the burden on poor families and make it attractive for them to send their children to school rather than to work?

Source: ILO, "Child Labour: Law and Practice", *Conditions of Work Digest*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1991, p. 14.

versal education, which are useful reminders of the point made earlier that making primary education compulsory is surely a useful step but it is far from sufficient for ensuring the intended impact on eradicating child labour. Panel III summarizes four major types of approaches to providing education and training not only for working children but also, in a more preventive fashion, for potential school drop-outs and at-risk children newly enrolled in school.

2. **Effective enforcement for ensuring the abolition of child labour in hazardous occupations**. ILO recognizes that enforcement in many countries has been ineffective for many reasons, including an absence of incentives, very weak inspection capacities, and corruption. Governments which are serious about dealing at least with the most severe problems of hazardous child labour must find ways to strengthen their enforcement and inspection machinery.

3. **Public mobilization and pressure**. Governments are sometimes incapable of making the fundamental changes in major policies and programmes which are required. "Sustained campaigns by human rights groups and non-governmental organizations, combined with full and vigorous exposure of abuses and dereliction of duty, are absolutely essential if governments are to give teeth to the law and fulfill their obligations..." [27]

From a UNICEF perspective, it is significant that the first of these three priorities relates to basic education and that the third, "public mobilization and pressure", is clearly the type of action which UNICEF has identified as being essential to meeting many of the goals for children for the 1990s, as well as for the effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the basis of ILO's own policy priorities in the area of child labour, therefore, the prospects for effective

27 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Panel III

Emerging initiatives to provide at-risk and working children with improved access to education and training

These projects focus on four major groups of children: (i) working children with no schooling; (ii) working children who have had some schooling but have dropped out of school; (iii) potential school drop-outs; and (iv) children newly enrolled at school. Some projects are aimed at providing non-formal education for those who have had some education. Others are targeted at groups (iii) and (iv). These have a preventive objective and are aimed at keeping children at school and combating the pressure to drop out by providing material and psychological support. Many children leave school because they are unable to afford stationery and other supplies, uniforms, transport and other necessities, even when tuition may be free. Thus, some of the programmes provide the required material and financial assistance. Other projects provide training in skills to enable child workers in certain hazardous occupations to shift to non-hazardous employment.

Almost all the educational programmes known to the ILO attempt to provide education and technical training to working children without causing disruption in their working and socio-economic environment. Many are based on an appreciation of the serious practical difficulties facing child workers. Therefore classes are often held after work hours, usually in the evenings. Even this may prove to be an unrealistic arrangement in some cases. Many children put in very long hours of work, and most work through the whole week. Evening or night schools could therefore be unsuitable for child workers who, after a whole day's work, would be too exhausted to attend classes. For this reason, some schools are run on Saturdays and holidays.

Many non-formal schooling projects provide not only free educational materials and in some cases even free uniforms, but also a fairly wide range of social services such as medical care and free meals. Some projects insist on a symbolic fee for meals and medical services in order to ensure and reinforce the child's commitment to the programme and to instil in the child the philosophy and practice of self-reliance.

The provision of free or subsidised nutrition and health services is intended not only to meet the needs of the children but also to promote school attendance and improve educational performance. Access to snacks or one good meal a day could more than make up for the lost earnings that result from missing work owing to school attendance. Nutrition has been found to be an effective way of interesting child workers in education and training programmes and in ensuring school attendance.

The cost of providing education can be high. Therefore, in order to reduce costs, some projects or programmes have tried to mobilize community support classes and equipment and to enlist volunteer teachers. Others have been able to operate their own schools with gifts from government or municipal authorities. Still others take advantage of the excess capacity in existing educational institutions by holding evening classes after regular sessions finish for the day.

The experience of ongoing non-formal education and training projects is reported on the whole to be encouraging. First, such approaches provide opportunities for children to become literate and to improve their education and skills without disrupting work or sacrificing income. In addition, these projects have demonstrated that it is feasible to complete the regular educational programme without sacrificing quality, even though the duration of instruction is shorter than in the regular schools. Second, these schools can be used not only as a medium for imparting education but also as a means of delivering other important services such as health care and nutrition. Third, they provide opportunities for social interaction, recreation and participation in community activities. Fourth, since many of these projects can carry out their educational activities in existing government or community schools, they provide a cost-effective, inexpensive way of providing education and welfare facilities. These positive experiences notwithstanding, non-formal education and training programmes also face several problems: absenteeism due to pressure of work and a reluctance by employers to facilitate school attendance; late arrivals, since many child workers are unable to leave their jobs on time, and high drop-out rates owing to frequent change of jobs and residence.

Source: Still So Far to Go: Child Labour in the World Today, ILO, Geneva, 1989, pp. 34-38.

collaboration between the ILO and UNICEF would seem to be excellent.

As part of closer ILO and UNICEF relations which are developing in several countries, it may be useful to consider a number of possible policy and programme innovations which could explicitly build on the comparative advantages of the two agencies. For example, ILO's mandate will continue to be stronger than UNICEF's in the area of enforcement of national and international labour standards relating to children. Could, however, UNICEF's higher degree of involvement with community-level organizations concerned with children better enable UNICEF to seek to engage these organizations, as well as schools, in 'non-formal' monitoring of labour practices involving children? Particularly for children in the 12-and-under age group, school teachers and key community leaders are much more likely than labour inspectors to have both the knowledge and the incentives to report 'missing children' of primary-school age. Similarly, UNICEF and its international allies in the basic education field, hopefully including UNESCO, the World Bank and the regional development banks, would presumably have a comparative advantage in finding better ways to identify and work with high-risk students from a school achievement perspective (especially in terms of risk of dropping out) and in linking that effort with the challenge of dealing with high risks for children in the workplace. Furthermore, UNICEF has a higher profile and more effective advocacy and social mobilization capability than other UN agencies when it comes to children (including the girl child); but this capability has not yet been directed in any significant way, perhaps with the exception of our programme in India, to dealing with the problem of child labour.

Although there are many specific actions which UNICEF could and should consider in terms of collaboration with ILO and others at the intersection of the child labour and the basic education challenges, it should be explicitly recognized that the most significant contribution UNICEF can make on the child labour front is probably through a higher level of commitment to the direct challenge of improving basic education, including formal primary schooling. It is to that main challenge, in the Latin American and Caribbean context, to which our attention now turns, if only briefly for our purposes in this paper.

STRENGTHENING BASIC EDUCATION TO COMBAT CHILD LABOUR AND INCREASE THE FUTURE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A recent paper by one of the authors of this essay describes a series of measures which need to be taken to strengthen the quality and relevance of basic education, especially primary schooling, in the region[28]. Here it should be sufficient simply to outline the strategy:

1. Making schools function more effectively by:
   (a) improving teacher training and teaching methods, especially in terms of: more student-centred approaches; reading comprehension based on the actual life experiences of children; more flexible promotion procedures; multi-grade systems in areas of low student density; bilingual education, where needed;
   (b) improved availability and quality of teaching materials, especially textbooks and more interactive materials;
   (c) increasing the number of hours and days of effective functioning of schools (notoriously low in Latin America);

2. Increasing the capacity of the young child to learn by:
   (a) expansion of family and community-based programmes for early childhood development and day care, especially for children and families from rural and marginal urban areas;
   (b) improved parental education and guidance, linked to these programmes for child care and development;

3. Promoting more flexibility in the school systems, especially in terms of the curriculum and school schedules, with the explicit purpose of increasing access for and retention of students poorly served by traditional schools;

4. Promoting and supporting local initiatives and decentralized mechanisms for the planning, management and monitoring of educational programmes, within well-defined and manageable

28 Colbert de Arboleda, see note 1 *supra*.

With its highly innovative approach to rural primary education, the *Escuela Nueva* (New School) Programme in Colombia encourages children to be active, creative, participative and responsible.

Children take part in electing the school government.

Children work in small groups using self-instruction workbooks, supplied free by the Government. The workbooks are designed to take into account the learning pace of each child.

The curricula facilitate learning by doing and playing, with objectives and themes directly related to the lifestyle of the children and their community.

photos UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

areas of influence of the schools, with the aim of achieving more relevant curricula and more participatory forms of school governance (involving parents, teachers, students and administrators);

5. Stimulating the 'demand' for education by mobilizing key institutions and actors in the civil society, including NGOs, churches, the private sector, unions and community leaders.

These kinds of reform measures need to be encouraged as part of UNICEF's ongoing work in basic education in Latin America. The proposed link to the issue of child labour and problems of working children offers a new perspective, however, on the challenge of educational reform. It recognizes that most working children in Latin America and the Caribbean also attend school, if only on a sporadic basis. It focuses attention on the problems not just of children who have, by and large, 'survived' primary school but also on those (still the majority) who are the frequent repeaters and drop-outs. It explicitly recognizes that education systems "must reach out to children who cannot be expected to attend school on a traditional basis"[29]. On the other hand, the proposed approach rejects the position that the formal education system cannot be reformed to accommodate the needs of at-risk or working children and that the needs of these children must be met, at best, by 'non-formal' alternatives. In the Latin American setting, non-formal education, especially at the primary level, has too often become simply a convenient cover for the failure to provide appropriate 'formal' schooling for all children.

29 UNICEF, "Working Children in Latin America: A Brief Statistical Report", UNICEF, Mexico City (unpublished paper, February 1993), p. 19.

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3 - SITUATION ANALYSIS, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Virtually all authors concerned with child labour and working children draw attention to the scarcity and unreliability of data concerning these issues[30]. The paucity of information often begins with such basic questions as the numerical magnitude of the problem and the critical issue of the age and gender distribution of working children. As an example of the sheer problem of numbers in the Latin American region, there are two recent contrasting estimates: one suggests that there are roughly four million working children between 10 and 14 years of age in 12 Latin American countries (with Brazil and Mexico accounting for 75 per cent of this total); but another first estimates a total of 450,000 in this same age group, just for the relatively small countries of Central America, but then adds that the actual figure is probably twice that[31].

A recent note from UNICEF-Mexico[32] cites a number of reasons for the lack of systematic information about working children in the region:

- employment surveys are generally concerned with the formal sector, neglecting the vast informal sectors where increasing numbers of children and youth find part-time and full-time work;
- surveys rarely attempt to identify working children under age 12, and generally fail to disaggregate the over-12 working children;
- most surveys are concerned only with urban populations.

To these concerns could be added a number of others including the difficulty of obtaining information regarding activities which are clearly illegal or hazardous, and the general failure to include a concern for excessive home-based work (including by young girls working as domestics) which may produce little or no income but may be a critical factor in terms of a child's ability to attend school on a regular and successful basis.

What is less widely recognized is the fact that censuses, household surveys and many other research procedures are expensive undertakings. One of the results, moreover, of the fiscal crises facing many Latin American and Caribbean governments is the decreasing availability of funds and other support for even standard surveys, let alone special studies. Increased financial pressures may also limit the extent to which UNICEF and other international organizations may be able to allocate funds during the coming years for research and studies. Consequently, the need to give careful consideration to priorities for situation analysis and other research is especially important. Criteria for choice should be firmly based on the likelihood that the results of the inquiry can be expected to help directly in addressing the main policy and programmatic issues with which this initiative is concerned. It is also important not to neglect opportunities to learn as much as possible from prior research, including through analytical literature reviews as well as re-analyses of the primary data from earlier surveys, which may include more relevant information on working and/or school children than was initially elaborated.

Consultations held over the past few months suggest the following initial guidelines for developing a research strategy and for identifying specific research topics and priorities in this area, particularly in terms of those meriting UNICEF support in the region:

1. Consideration should be given to a broad two-fold distinction between: (a) **the analysis of situations** – linked, as noted above, to specific prospects for policy or programme development; and (b) **evaluation of interventions**, focusing quite pragmatically on questions relating to what is working, what is not, and why, as well as on problem-solving in the implementation of programmes.

30 Myers, see note 12, *supra*, pp. 5-10 and *passim*.
31 UNICEF, see note 29 *supra*, pp. 7-10; PREALC/OIT, PARLACEN, UNICEF, *Centroamerica: Los Menores de Edad y el Trabajo*, Guatemala, September 1993, p. 3.
32 UNICEF, see note 29 supra, pp. 15-16.

2. A strategy needs to be built into research plans from the beginning for the utilization of the results both for policy formulation and for social mobilization and advocacy – with an explicit recognition that addressing some of the key problems is constrained more by a failure of the political will to deal with them effectively than by poor understanding of the problems.

3. Research should be avoided which is either likely to confirm what is already obvious to most experienced observers, or which is likely to detract attention from the political and indeed ethical importance of the 'first principles' outlined above, especially regarding: (a) the commitment to the eradication of child labour for children of 12 and under (and progressively to the next age group, as provided in minimum age legislation); and (b) the strengthening of the formal primary school system in the region.

4. Further specification of research priorities should go hand-in-hand with decision making at the country level regarding policy and programme development opportunities foreseen during the coming years in the areas of basic education, children's rights, and 'children in especially difficult circumstances', especially working children. This programme orientation requires the development and utilization of rapid appraisal procedures whenever possible.

5. To the extent, as expected, that some common research and evaluation questions will emerge from the further country-level deliberations in the Latin American and Caribbean region, a concerted effort should be encouraged to facilitate comparative cross-country analysis, wherever possible. Among other results, it can be expected that a broader comparative approach will help to enhance the likely political impact of the results both at the international and the national levels.

Further research is needed to fill in the many information gaps on child labour and working children.
photo UNICEF/Maria Morrison

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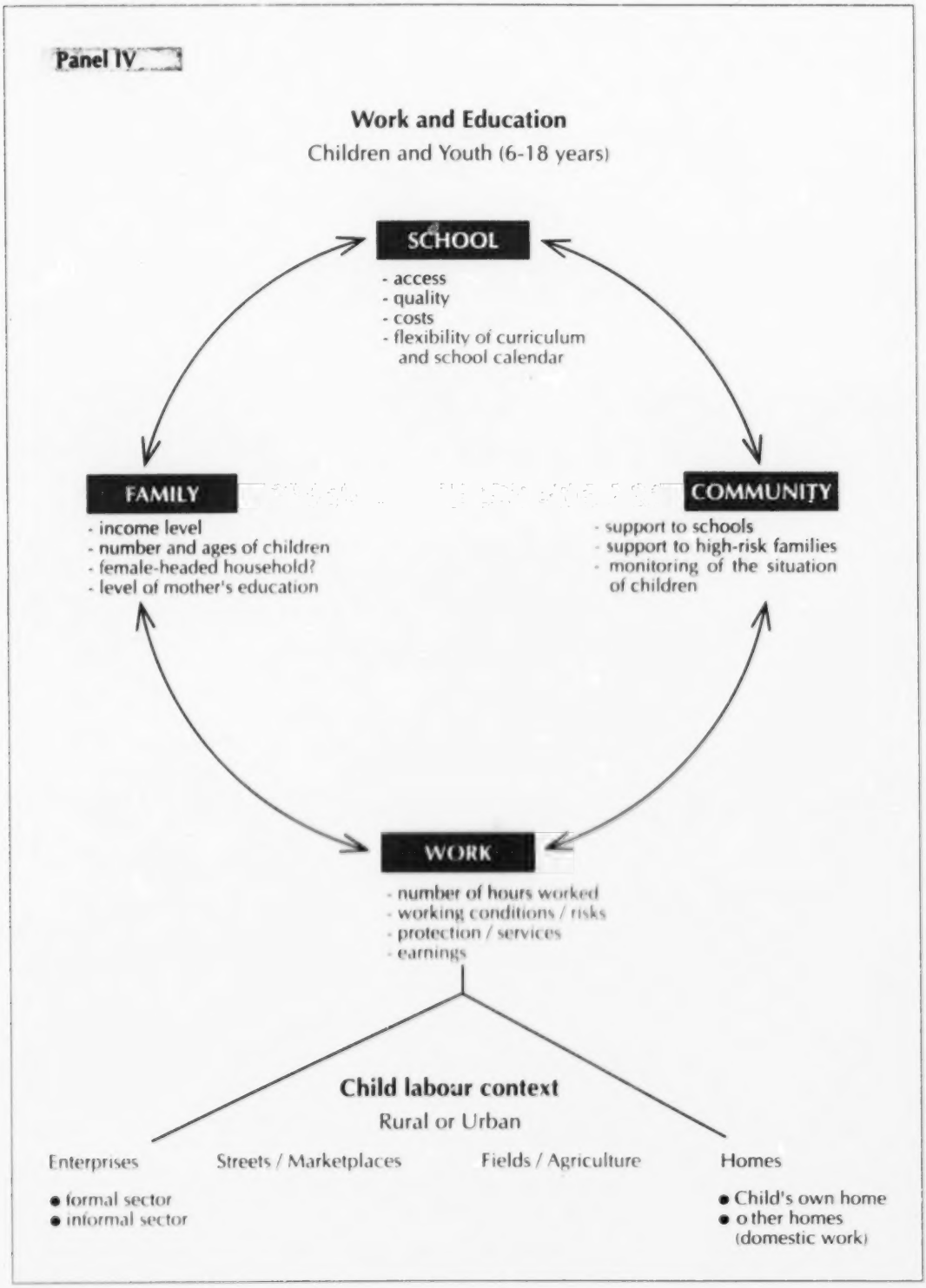
Panel IV


Work and Education
Children and Youth (6-18 years)
SCHOOL
- access
- quality
- costs
- flexibility of curriculum and school calendar
FAMILY
- income level
- number and ages of children
- female-headed household?
- level of mother's education
COMMUNITY
- support to schools
- support to high-risk families
- monitoring of the situation of children
WORK
- number of hours worked
- working conditions / risks
- protection / services
- earnings
Child labour context
Rural or Urban
Enterprises
● formal sector
● informal sector
Streets / Marketplaces
Fields / Agriculture
Homes
● Child's own home
● other homes (domestic work)

Within these general guidelines, an effort is underway, involving colleagues from both UNICEF and ILO, as well as independent consultants, to identify the key research questions, as well as appropriate methodologies which appear to merit attention on a cross-national basis. Panel IV provides a rough schematic framework, intended simply to draw attention to what we expect may be key variables and relationships to be explored: in the family, the schools, the workplace and the community context. Panel V summarizes a modest number of research issues which have been proposed by several UNICEF colleagues, conscious of the limitations of time and resources available for work of this nature.

Panel V

Some illustrative research issues in the area of child labour and basic education in Latin America and the Caribbean

BASIC DATA/SITUATION ANALYSES

- Number and proportion of children working, disaggregated by:
  - age group
  - gender
  - number of hours worked
  - conditions of work
  - access to schools
- Number and proportion of children in school, disaggregated by:
  - age group
  - gender
  - schooling/working time distribution
- Family/community context

RELATIONSHIP OF WORK AND EDUCATION

- Why children work versus study
- Attitudes of parents and children to education and to work
- Impact of work on schooling, disaggregated by age group:
  - attendance (including repetition, desertion)
  - achievement
  - relationship of hours worked and working conditions to school performance

PROGRAMME AND POLICY ASSESSMENTS

- Comparison of legal norms and actual practices in terms of both compulsory schooling and permissible work
- Evaluation of innovative programmes seeking to reduce school repetition and desertion
- Evaluation of programmes seeking to increase the viability of combining education and meaningful work opportunities for children (over 12)

Source: Adapted from several UNICEF sources, including: Nelson Ortiz, "Notas Sobre la Investigación en el Area del Trabajo Infantil y Juvenil", unpublished notes, UNICEF Bogotá, March 1994.

4 - POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS AND COMMENTS WELCOME

This essay is written very much in the spirit of a 'discussion paper', which the authors hope will serve at least two purposes. The first is to draw more attention in UNICEF and elsewhere to the importance of the child labour issue and its close link to the subject of basic education – a relationship which is seen as especially significant in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the basic education goals for children for the 1990s in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and beyond. The second is to elicit comments and suggestions both regarding particularly promising points of policy and programme intervention and, closely related, regarding priorities for situation analysis, research and evaluation. The UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, in Bogota, and the International Child Development Centre, in Florence, anticipate supporting promising initiatives of this sort, in close cooperation with UNICEF country offices in the region.

Among other fora, it is anticipated that there will be an opportunity for discussion of this paper and related issues at a meeting later in 1994 involving ILO, UNICEF, and other interested organizations with the goal of developing an international action plan for an increased commitment to combatting child labour and promoting related improvements in basic education.

One of the obstacles which will clearly need to be overcome, in addressing the closely related problems of dealing with child labour and pro-

There are still major information gaps on child labour and working children.

photo UNICEF/Maria Morrison

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viding basic education for all children, is the tendency for these two issues to be separated in public-sector planning and in the way concerned organizations, including schools, approach them in terms of programme implementation and day-to-day action. Within UNICEF, as well, it will be important to encourage much more interaction between staff concerned with the problems of working and street children, on the one hand, and those involved in basic education programmes, on the other.

In closing, it is worth stressing in this context a point frequently made by UNICEF but which so often goes unheeded, even in our own ranks. Economic resources to address problems such as basic education and child labour are clearly important and are especially a limiting factor in the lower-income countries. But the critical missing link which is needed to mobilize economic as well as human and other required resources is often a matter of weak political commitment, linked to questionable choices resulting from the gross inequities built into both 'political' and 'market-driven' decision-making processes in societies. How much can be done, and how fast, to change these inequities is an open question. But no programme of the type advocated in this paper should begin without a clear recognition of the fundamentally political and ethical issues involved. Fortunately, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides UNICEF and its major partners with a much strengthened mandate to address issues such as child labour and basic education head-on. A new set of exciting opportunities has clearly arisen. The time to act is at hand. If action and careful reflection on the political and strategic elements of the challenge can be skilfully combined, the chances of success, in the prevailing circumstances of Latin America and the Caribbean, are surely on the side of the region's children and their true allies in government and in the broader civil society.

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